

## Competency-based Admission Standards: Aligning Postsecondary Education with K-12 Education Reform

January 1999

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### BACKGROUND

In 1994, in response to K-12 education reform implemented in House Bill 1209, the Legislature directed the HECB to develop a competency-based admissions system for higher education institutions. The Legislature further directed the Board to complete the design of the system and issue a report outlining the competency-based admissions system by January, 1999.

In 1995, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) began a process to revise its minimum college admissions standards from traditional measures to competency-based admissions standards. The HECB convened an Admissions Standards Action Committee (ASAC) that included representatives of K-12 education, vocational education, all six public baccalaureate institutions, independent institutions, community colleges, parents, and students to guide the process of developing new standards. ASAC was charged to complete the following tasks:

- **Examine** the standards under which students gain entrance into a public baccalaureate institution;
- **Translate** the current standards in terms of mastery;
- **Identify** how those translated standards will be measured and reported; and
- **Facilitate** a smooth transition to higher education for students.

ASAC divided its work on the competency-based admissions standards project into three phases:

- **Phase one**, which has been completed for English, mathematics, and world languages, designates core-course equivalencies in terms of competencies.
- **Phase two**, which began in 1997, represents the development of a process for assessing and reporting students' achievement.
- **Phase three**, which will begin in 1999, will evaluate the project's components.

ASAC has crafted competency-based admissions standards as a *translation* of the current HECB standards; they are not intended to raise minimum admissions standards. The Commission on Student Learning has established standards for what students should know and be able to do at certain points in their K-12 experience. These standards are called Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs). The proposed competency-based admissions standards have been created by using and, as necessary, adding to the EALRs.

This report completes a *structure* for a competency-based admissions system to address Washington public high school students who will be graduating from high school with Certificates of Mastery beginning in 2006. Work, however, will continue on the completion of a process that responds to and aligns with the Certificate of Mastery and the Essential Academic Learning Requirements, as directed by the Education Reform Act of 1993 (RCW 28A.630.883), and on evaluation of the project's components.

## **Competency-based Admission Standards: Aligning Postsecondary Education with K-12 Education Reform**

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### **PURPOSE**

*The purpose of the Competency-based Admissions Project is to create a college admissions process that is consistent with public K-12 education reform efforts, and to ensure that the admissions process for public colleges and universities is accessible to all students, regardless of how they prepare for postsecondary education.*

### **BACKGROUND**

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) is required by law to establish *minimum* requirements for admission to Washington's public baccalaureate institutions (RCW 28B.80.350). The HECB adopted the current admissions policy in 1987; this policy was fully implemented for students entering fall term 1992. The policy describes minimum high school core requirements in terms of years of study. Minimum admission criteria currently include grade point average, pre-college test scores (SAT/ACT), and a distribution of core-course requirements.

Current standards, however, do not align with education reform as described in the Education Reform Act of 1993 (RCW 28A.630.883). It outlined an education structure that no longer would rely on traditional Carnegie units (seat time) as the measure to determine completion of basic education. The new law established the Commission on Student Learning to perform the following duties:

- identify knowledge and skills all public school students need to know and be able to do;
- develop a student assessment and accountability system;
- develop a Certificate of Mastery as part of the new assessment system;
- develop a performance-based education system;
- develop recommendations for consideration by the HECB for adopting college entrance requirements that are consistent with the essential learning requirements and Certificate of Mastery.

This final directive intersects with HECB statutory authority to establish minimum admissions standards and presents an opportunity for higher education to take a leadership role in addressing K-12 educational reform.

### **Legislative Direction to the HECB for Competency-based Admissions**

In 1994, in response to K-12 education reform implemented in House Bill 1209, the Legislature directed the HECB to develop a competency-based admissions system for higher education institutions. The Legislature further directed the Board to complete the design of the system and issue a report outlining the competency-based admissions system by January 1999.

In 1995, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) began a process to revise its minimum college admissions standards from traditional measures to competency-based admissions standards. The HECB convened an Admissions Standards Action Committee (ASAC) that included representatives of K-12 education, vocational education, all six public baccalaureate institutions, independent institutions, community colleges, parents, and students to guide the process of developing new standards. ASAC was charged to complete the following tasks:

- **Examine** the standards under which students gain entrance into a public baccalaureate institution;
- **Translate** the current standards from “seat-time” into terms of mastery;
- **Identify** how those translated standards will be measured and reported; and
- **Facilitate** a smooth transition to higher education for students.

ASAC drafted competency-based admissions standards in English, mathematics, world languages, science, social science, and art as a translation of the current standards; they are not intended to increase minimum admissions standards. Each of the subject area standards derive from the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs), which the Commission on Student Learning (CSL) created. The HECB approved the draft competency-based admissions standards in English, mathematics, and world languages in June 1997. These standards align with the reading, writing, communication, and mathematics EALRs that were approved by CSL and the Legislature. As the Commission on Student Learning develops EALRs in science, social science, and art, the Admissions Standards Action Committee will finalize its draft competency-based standards, and present recommendations on them to the HECB for approval.

### **Pilot Testing New Admissions Standards**

A student follow-up system has been created and the phase for testing a competency-based system has been initiated at three high schools; a fourth was added this year. English, mathematics, and world language high school teachers are creating assignments for their students that will reveal evidence of their proficiency relative to the competency-based admissions standards. In order to refine the definitions and expectations of competency, pilot teachers meet with college faculty to review and evaluate the student work twice a year. As the project proceeds, a collection of student work and examples of scoring criteria will be created as a resource that eventually will be shared with college and high school faculty throughout the state. Competency-based admissions standards could be used at the pilot schools beginning in 2000.

### **Project Funding**

State funds and two grants from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) support the project. In order to expand the pilot testing of the admissions standards and ensure a smooth transition to a competency-based system, the HECB has requested continued state funding for the Project during the 1999-01 biennium in the amount of \$140,000.

### **The CBA Standards Development Process**

The Admissions Standards Action Committee divided its work on the Competency-based Admissions Standards project into three phases:

- ◆ **Phase one** reflects the work ASAC is coordinating to translate current core subject-area standards (four years of English, three years of mathematics at the algebra-level or higher, three years of social studies, two years of science, two years of a second language, and one year of art) into competencies. The competencies will require that students demonstrate specific levels of proficiency in each standard.

One outcome during this phase of the project has been the Board's approval of the translation into competencies of current minimum admissions standards in mathematics, world languages, and English. These competencies are being implemented as part of a pilot project with four high schools. The pilot project is studying how colleges will be able to determine *when* and *at what levels* students achieve these competencies (Appendix A). As efforts proceed with the development of performance standards in English, mathematics and world languages, work continues on translating science, social studies, and art (Appendix B) into competencies that align with educational reform efforts.

- ◆ **Phase two** represents the development of a process for assessing and reporting students' achievement of the standards. The Admissions Standards Action Committee is working to develop an assessment prototype that recognizes what students know and are able to do regardless of their preparation pathway (academic/applied/vocational).

The committee also is working closely with the State Board of Education to develop a standardized reporting form for Washington State public high school students. The reporting form will replace the current statewide uniform transcript. However, like the uniform transcript, it will clearly reflect how well students have met the new admissions standards.

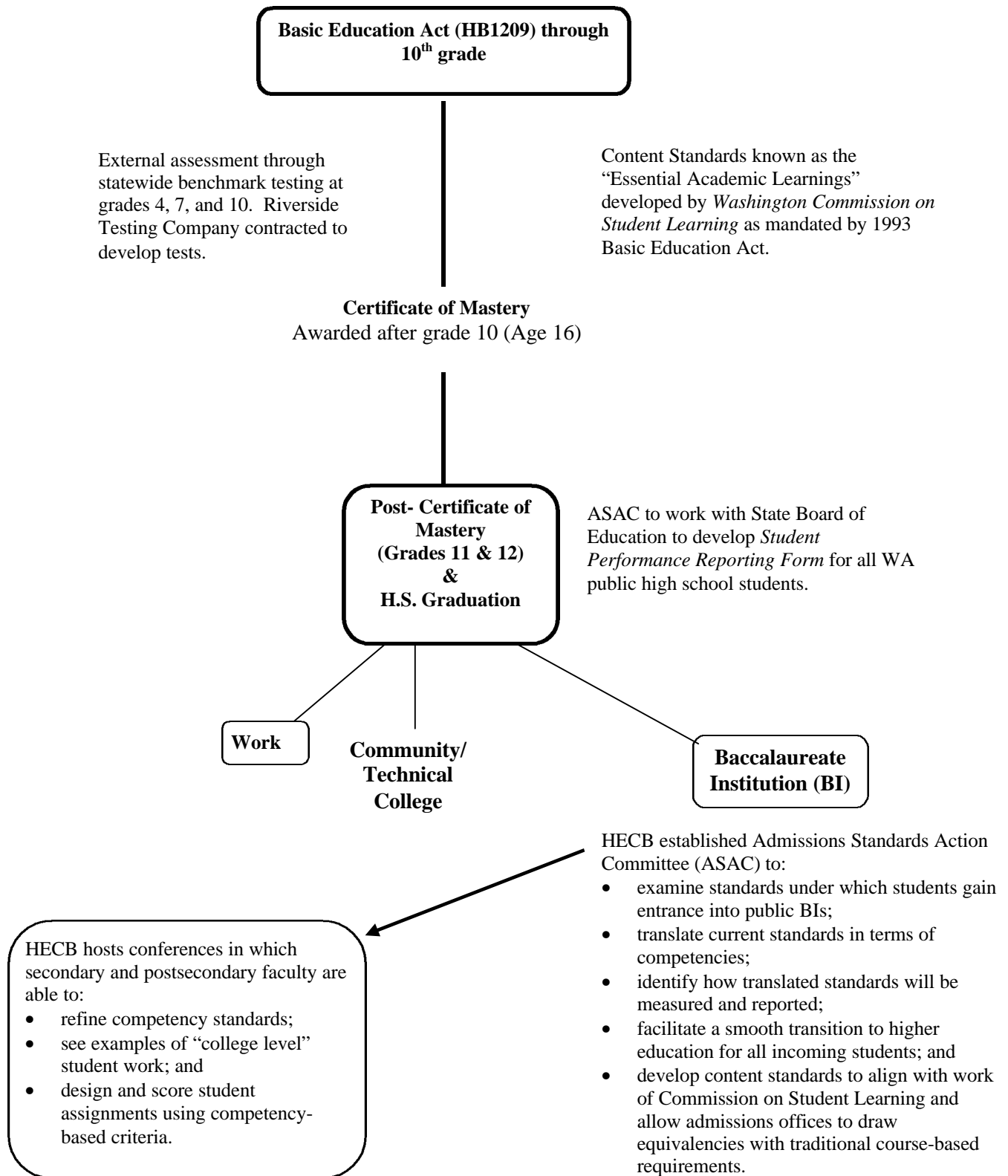
In order to be useful, the assessment design will need to distinguish clearly among levels of student preparation, and between Certificate of Mastery and college admissions standards. The assessment design will assess levels of student achievement so that competitive colleges can select the highest achieving applicants.

- ◆ **Phase three** will evaluate the project's many components. Embedded within the project are three types of evaluation:

**Level 1: Student Assessment** will answer the question, "How do we assess students' competencies for purposes of college/university admission?"

**Level 2: Performance Measures** will answer the question, "How well do students admitted under competency-based standards perform?"

**Level 3: Project Success** will answer the question, "How successful has the Admissions Standards Project been?" The response will address a number of process and outcome variables.

**Figure 1. Education Reform and Competency-based Admissions in Washington**

## TIMETABLE FOR BUILDING A COMPETENCY-BASED SYSTEM

Steps in Developing a Competency-based Admissions System	Timetable
<p><b>Translate the current core curricular requirements into competencies that build upon the essential academic learning requirements specified by the CSL (<i>Phase One</i>).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff meets with faculty representatives from each of the core subject areas: English, math, world languages science, social studies, art</li> <li>Board approves new standards: English, math, world languages science, social studies, art</li> </ul>	<p>1997-1999</p> <p>1996-1997 1997-1998</p> <p>June 1997 June 1999</p>
<p><b>Identify the criteria needed to judge whether students have developed the expected competencies, and at what level of proficiency (<i>Phase Two</i>).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate three pilot projects at selected high schools to bring together high school and college faculty to assess student work designed to provide evidence of progress toward the competencies in the areas of English, math, and world languages</li> <li>Expand the pilot projects to 4 selected high schools to broaden the types of assignments and refine the criteria used to judge the quality of student work produced as evidence of competency.</li> <li>Expand the pilot projects to 6 selected high schools, adding the disciplines of science, social studies, and art.</li> </ul>	<p>1997-1998</p> <p>1998-1999 1999-2000</p>
<p><b>Disseminate the work of the pilot projects statewide in the form of a resource guide for high school teachers (<i>Phase Two</i>).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The resource guides will contain examples of student work at different levels of proficiency, and will specify what criteria were used to judge the student work. These guides (one per core area) will help clarify for high school teachers the minimum level of competency expected of students entering public baccalaureate institutions. (minimum one set of guides per school)</li> </ul>	<p>1999-2000</p>
<p><b>Develop in conjunction with the State Board of Education a student performance reporting form that admissions officers can use to judge whether students have met the minimum competency-based admissions standards (<i>Phase Two</i>).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train high school personnel and college admissions officers on the preparation of competency-based admissions applications.</li> <li>Develop training manual and disseminate statewide.</li> </ul>	<p>Spring 2000 2000+</p>
<p><b>Work with college faculty and administrators to align entry-level placement exams with the competency-based standards (<i>Phase Two</i>).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convene college faculty and administrators to discuss issues related to content and timing of placement exams</li> </ul>	<p>2000+</p>
<p><b>Evaluate the first-year and long-term success of students entering college with competency-based admissions applications (<i>Phase Three</i>).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design and implement a research study to analyze first-year success using variables <i>such as</i> remedial course registration rates, credit completion rates, retention rates, grade-point average, etc.</li> <li>Design and implement a research study to analyze long-term success using variables <i>such as</i> grade-point average, graduation rates, alumni satisfaction, employment rates, graduation efficiency/average time to degree.</li> </ul>	<p>2000+</p>
<p><b>Evaluate the impact of competency-based admissions as a vehicle for accommodating K-12 reform and for helping to establish student learning outcomes in higher education (<i>Phase Three</i>).</b></p>	<p>2000+</p>

## GOALS OF A COMPETENCY-BASED ADMISSIONS SYSTEM

The Competency-based Admissions project is producing an admissions system that allows for timely and manageable review and evaluation of competency-based standards for college admissions. It is designed to achieve the following goals:

- ◆ **Encourage and reflect academic excellence.** At its June 1997 meeting in Pullman, the Higher Education Coordinating Board adopted competency-based equivalencies of time-based requirements in the subject areas of English, mathematics, and world languages. The work of defining standards for science, social science, and the arts is proceeding and will be presented to the Board for review and approval upon completion. By providing clear statements of desired competencies, the competency-based standards are intended to describe for teachers what their students need to know and demonstrate in order to succeed in a college setting. Both the current system and the competency-based system will continue to use pre-college test scores (SAT and ACT) as a component of the admissions process. Ultimately, students will understand that they must strive to achieve certain specific performance standards; it will no longer be enough to fulfill attendance-based standards.

The Legislature has expressed concern regarding the number of students needing to enroll in remedial course work before they can perform college-level work. Lawmakers also have expressed a desire to reduce the time students need to complete a degree program. Currently there does not appear to be any connection between high school exit and college entrance requirements. The project's assessment phase will review the practical application of aligning college placement examinations in English and mathematics with high school exit requirements.

- ◆ **Distinguish clearly between the newly developed Certificate of Mastery and minimum college admissions requirements.** How minimum college admissions requirements are reported is very important to the success of the project. As a result, work has begun — in collaboration with the State Board of Education and the High School Graduation Requirements Committee — on the development of a form to report subject-area completion. It will reflect subject-area completion up to and beyond Certificate of Mastery, as well as distinguishing among levels of achievement.

A statewide reporting form will need to be approved and operational on a voluntary basis as early as with the class of 2000. That is the year when Certificate of Mastery will be available on a voluntary basis for any public high school in Washington. The reporting form will need to be approved and operational on a required basis beginning with the class of 2006. In 2006 the Certificate of Mastery will be required of all Washington State public high school seniors for graduation.

- ◆ **Accommodate students with differing types (technical/academic) of education and be manageable for both admissions offices and high schools.** A core-course approval process was developed and jointly approved by the State Board of Education and the Higher Education Coordinating Board. It established clear guidelines for high school districts to approve new course offerings for the purpose of meeting college entrance core-course requirements. To accommodate the high volume and wide variety of high school offerings that satisfy core course

requirements for college admissions, a database was created which identifies these courses and subject area titles. The database, which is updated annually, is sent to and utilized by the state baccalaureate institutions. It is also recognized and used by the University of Oregon. Recently, the NCAA has begun to use the database in eligibility decisions regarding student athletes.

- ◆ **Distinguish among levels of student preparation, determine how well the system identifies qualified students, and accurately predict which students are prepared and will be successful applicants.** As components of education reform are put in place in Washington State, it is important to capture information about student performance on an annual basis. The *Graduate Follow-up Study '96* (Appendix C) collected baseline information for three schools that will comprise an experimental group in the evaluation design developed for the project. To ensure that the baseline information reflects reliable data, the three schools in the experimental group also will be matched with comparison (*control*) high schools beginning with the *Graduate Follow-up Study '97*. It is planned to expand to additional pilot sites each academic year (A fourth high school, Kamiakin High School, was incorporated into the study in 1998).

The evaluation design will compare and contrast the baseline information gathered at each of the experimental schools over the period of the project. The evaluation design also will compare experimental and control schools to support a more complete evaluation of differences and similarities between pilot schools, their control schools, and the statewide sample. Information from the three experimental schools will be compared with findings from the control schools to determine the success of students who enter college through a competency-based admission process. Control school data will be reported beginning with *Graduate Follow-up Study '97*.

The three schools selected as the education reform case-study (*experimental*) group are Selah High School, Selah School District; Mount Lake Terrace High School, Edmonds School District; and Lake Washington High School, Lake Washington School District.

The three schools selected as the comparison (*control*) group for *Graduate Follow-up Study '97* are Ellensburg High School, Ellensburg School District; Meadowdale High School, Edmonds School District; Juanita High School, Lake Washington School District.

- ◆ **Coordinate with surrounding states and recognized nationwide.** The competency-based admissions project has been a model of school-college cooperation. As a result of this project, presidents of the six public baccalaureate institutions and the executive director of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges issued a statement of support welcoming applicants from schools where K-12 restructuring promotes high academic standards and prepares students for success after high school.

As a member of the West Coast Proficiency-based Admissions Consortium, the Admissions Standards Action Committee has helped craft statements of support for competency-based admissions systems. These statements have been exchanged with the state of Oregon, the University of California system, and Stanford University. Support for developing articulation



agreements also has been initiated with the states of Colorado, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Additional statements are being negotiated with other state systems. The project also has been working closely with the West Coast Proficiency-based Admissions Consortium in an effort to coordinate its assessment phase of competency-based admissions standards with the Oregon Proficiency Admissions Standards System project.

Washington State was selected as one of six states for the State Higher Education Executive Officers/ACT *Study of State Strategies that Support Successful Student Transitions from Secondary to Postsecondary Education*. Findings on the competency-based admissions standards project were highlighted at a national symposium. Those findings will serve as the basis for a policy brief that should elicit further discussion and reaction by state education leaders and representatives of national education organizations.

Additionally, efforts were initiated with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the NCAA Clearinghouse to begin accommodating the education reform efforts in Washington State. The NCAA and its clearinghouse traditionally have been reluctant to accept any coursework that did not fit very traditional definitions. After consultation with, among others, the Executive Director of the HECB, the NCAA's Academic Requirements Committee recommended changes in the NCAA's current method of evaluating high school courses. These changes recognized that high school curriculum is evolving, and that the current evaluative process suffers from a number of factors that have stymied the Association's efforts to develop criteria that are widely accepted. As a result of this recognition, HECB staff, Doug Scrima, was invited to serve on the NCAA's Core Course Review Committee. Further, the NCAA Division I Board of Directors approved core-course evaluation changes that give high school principals the authority to determine which of their courses meet the definition of core courses.

## **WORKING PRINCIPLES FOR A COMPETENCY-BASED SYSTEM**

The competency-based admissions standards for Washington State have been crafted as a translation of the current standards; they are not intended to raise minimum admissions standards. The Commission on Student Learning has established standards for what students should know and be able to do at certain points in their K-12 experience. These standards are called **Essential Academic Learning Requirements**. The competency-based admissions standards have been created by using and, as necessary, adding on to the essential academic learning requirements (e.g., *world language*). Baccalaureate and community college faculty members have played a key role in the developmental and assessment phases of the project. As we continue the process of defining what students should know and be able to demonstrate, postsecondary faculty involvement will remain a crucial component in ensuring that competency-based standards are a fair and accurate translation of the current minimum admissions standards.

High school graduates who will be applying from schools in transition, from private high schools, or from schools outside the state may have traditional transcripts that will continue to be evaluated with the current HECB minimum admissions standards. Home-schooled students also are exempt from the Certificate of Mastery and will be accommodated in ways that recognize their preparation, as is done today.

The scope of the competency-based admissions standards project is quite comprehensive. The Admissions Standards Action Committee has been working to coordinate all aspects of the

project. However, the primary charge of the Committee is to **report to the Higher Education Coordinating Board recommendations on a competency-based admissions system.** In approaching its tasks, the Admissions Standards Action Committee has identified several key issues. The Committee agreed on the following common working principles:

- ◆ **Many different education systems can prepare students for college.** The ASAC supports and encourages schools embracing school reform strategies, as well as those that strive for excellence within traditional methodologies and curricula;
- ◆ **Public baccalaureate institutions will evaluate applicants with non-traditional educational experiences in a fair and equitable way** that does not disadvantage the applicant;
- ◆ **Competency-based admission standards should replace traditional HECB minimum admissions standards (grade point average and Carnegie units) for Washington State high school graduates who have completed a Certificate of Mastery and who are applying to a public baccalaureate institution.** High school graduates who were home schooled, or who come from schools in transition, from private high schools, or from outside the state with traditional transcripts, will continue to be evaluated with the current HECB minimum admissions standards;
- ◆ **The ASAC is not developing individual institutional admission standards.** Standards or levels higher than the HECB minimum admission standards will continue to be developed by some institutions in order to ensure a proper student match with the institution and its mission;
- ◆ **The Certificate of Mastery will provide evidence that students have successfully mastered the essential academic learning requirements.** However, the ASAC also recognizes that not all students will desire or be prepared to attend college upon leaving high school, and that other various pathways to postsecondary education and work will be available;
- ◆ **Although Certificate of Mastery will be one standard required for admission from Washington State public high school students, additional minimum admissions standards will be needed in order to meet the equivalent of current admissions standards;**
- ◆ **The ASAC will recommend a standardized reporting form for Washington State public high schools** to provide to state colleges and universities when their students apply for admission. The reporting form will be designed to include Certificate of Mastery achievements, classroom assessments, and assessments of curricula completed after the Certificate of Mastery;
- ◆ **It is desirable to report levels of achievement on the Certificate of Mastery.** A Pass/No Pass score on the certificate is not an adequate indicator for making competitive admissions

decisions. Reporting levels of certificate achievement and the date each benchmark is completed must be provided in order to assist institutions making competitive decisions;

- ◆ **Postsecondary faculty will continue to participate in the process of identifying the academic work required beyond Certificate of Mastery for freshman entry-level college courses;**
- ◆ **The predictive values of the competency-based admissions measures and their relationship to more traditional markers (e.g., traditional grades and test scores) should be determined through pilot testing and on-going evaluation.**

### **BUDGET INFORMATION**

State allocations (FY97-FY98) and two grant awards from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grants have support this project. FIPSE funds are available through April 2000. **Additional funds for FY99 and FY00 will be required to expand the number of pilot sites asked to assess and report student competencies.** The HECB will request state support in the 1999-01 biennium for this portion of the project. The project has been divided into three phases:

1. Defining competency-based equivalencies of traditional requirements;

<b><i>FIPSE I Grant:</i></b>	<b><u>1996-99</u></b>
	<b><i>\$51,296</i></b>

<b><i>State Allocation:</i></b>	<b><u>FY97</u></b>
	<b><i>\$32,000</i></b>

2. Identifying how to assess and report student competencies;

<b><i>FIPSE II Grant:</i></b>	<b><u>1998-2000</u></b>
	<b><i>\$31,860</i></b>

<b><i>State Allocation:</i></b>	<b><u>FY98</u></b>	<b><u>FY99</u></b>
	<b><i>\$55,500</i></b>	<b><i>\$55,500</i></b>

<b><i>State Allocation:</i></b>	<b><u>FY00</u></b>	<b><u>FY01</u></b>
<b><i>(Requested)</i></b>	<b><i>\$40,000</i></b>	<b><i>\$85,000</i></b>

3. Project implementation and evaluation.

<b><i>FIPSE I Grant:</i></b>	<b><u>1996-99</u></b>
	<b><i>\$60,000</i></b>

<b><i>FIPSE II Grant:</i></b>	<b><u>1998-2000</u></b>
	<b><i>\$54,000</i></b>

## POST-CERTIFICATE COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT

As the project proceeds, a collection of student work and examples of scoring criteria will be created as a resource that eventually will be shared with college and high school faculty throughout the state. Initially, these examples will be drawn from the subject areas of English, mathematics, and world languages. **As other subject areas become part of the Certificate of Mastery requirement (e.g., science) and as core admissions competencies in the social sciences and the arts are approved by the HECB, examples of those subjects also will be included as part of the statewide resource.**

The pilot phase for admitting students with a competency-based system was originally scheduled as part of the second FIPSE grant and was proposed to begin with the fall term, 2000. However, it became evident that the project could not begin reviewing competency-based standards for purpose of college admissions if teachers were not clear about what they should be assessing. The HECB decided to modify the original grant to include an initial pilot program in which high school teachers at three pilot high schools would integrate into their normal curriculum assignments for their students that would provide evidence of proficiency of the competency-based admissions standards. In order to refine the definitions and expectations of competency, the pilot teachers would be convened with college faculty to review and evaluate the student work:

- ◆ To begin refining the minimum competency-based admissions requirements and establishing levels of proficiency for them, the HECB began working with teachers at Selah, Mountlake Terrace, and Lake Washington High Schools during the 1997-98 academic year. Kamiakin High School (Richland) began participating during the 1998-99 academic year. The teachers were asked to integrate into their normal curriculum assignments for their students that would provide evidence of proficiency of the competency-based admissions standards. The following year they were asked to create assignments that were tailored to meet specific admissions standards.
- ◆ Scoring conferences were hosted during spring 1997 and the following fall so that college and high school faculty could begin to refine standards and create assignments. Prior to the conference, HECB staff had prepared for each participant a rough draft of proficiency statements and had asked postsecondary faculty to bring examples of college freshman assignments and assessments to review at the conference. The statements illustrated the level of concrete detail that eventually must be attained in order to describe what students should know and be able to do to enter college; the examples provided the high school teachers with samples of what is expected of entering college students. The resources were very useful as secondary and postsecondary faculty continued the work of refining proficiency statements in English, mathematics, and world languages.

Project staff will continue to examine and evaluate how reliable the competencies and assessments are as admissions criteria. Revised proficiency statements were created after the fall scoring conference. They will provide the participating high school teachers with the information they need to create their assignments for their high school students. The assignments are being tailored to assess the specific criteria described in the admissions standards. The teachers will also be creating scoring criteria to differentiate levels of

proficiency. **When the group is convened again in the spring, assignments and scoring criteria will be evaluated. The process of modifying statements will also continue.**

In addition to participating during the first year, the original three high schools have agreed to continue as pilot sites over the subsequent two academic years (1998-99 and 1999-2000), during which examples of student work will be compiled to add to the statewide collection of student work. The assignments will provide evidence of proficiency of the competency-based admissions standards and help project staff to establish benchmarks that meet or exceed the standards. The competency-based admissions standards could provide the basis for making college admissions decisions on seniors at the pilot schools applying to the state public baccalaureate institutions as early as fall term, 2000.

### PROJECT SUMMARY

A structure for a competency-based admissions system has been completed to address Washington public high school students who will be graduating from high school with Certificates of Mastery beginning in 2006. **Work will continue on the completion of a process that responds to and aligns with the Certificate of Mastery and the Essential Academic Learning Requirements as directed by the Education Reform Act of 1993 (RCW 28A.630.883).** Work will also continue on evaluation of the project's many components.

The groundwork for translating current standards into competencies had been completed by the time that the development of scoring criteria of student work began in June 1998. The groundwork for translating standards included the following:

- Convening the Admissions Standards Action Committee;
- Developing a process that authorizes high schools to approve core-course offerings;
- Creating a core-course database that identifies each core course offering by high school;
- Translating core-course equivalencies in terms of competencies in English, mathematics, and world languages (work continues on the development of competency-based content standards in science, social studies, and art);
- Recognizing competency-based admissions standards (statewide and out of the state);
- Designing an initial pilot project to with three high schools to develop classroom assignments that will provide evidence of proficiency;
- Selecting college faculty to work with high school teachers;
- Developing a plan for reporting competency-based admissions standards in English, mathematics, and world languages for purpose of college admission as early as fall, 2000;
- Utilizing the *Graduate Follow-up Study* to monitor student success.

Representatives of the Federal Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) are very encouraged by the Washington model. Other programs, such as the one in Oregon, are very expensive and are relying on millions of dollars of grant money. **Whereas it is not clear how or whether these other states will be able to sustain the funding requirements after their grant monies expire, the Washington model reflects a reliable and less expensive approach to meeting the higher education's responsibilities to educational reform efforts (i.e., the alignment of admissions standards with K-12 reform initiatives).**

## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix A Competency-based Admissions Standards Pilot Project
- Appendix B Competency-based Equivalencies of Time-based Requirements
- Appendix C Research Report

For a copy of the appendices, please contact the HECB at (360)753-7830.